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REMARKS.

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WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A RECOMMENDATION FOR DECENTRALIZATION, THIS SPEECH DESCRIBES P.S. 192M IN HARLEM, WHICH IS ADMINISTERED BY AN INDEPENDENT PRINCIPAL WHO IS THE KEY FIGURE IN DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION HIS STUDENTS RECEIVE. HOWEVER, A PRINCIPAL USUALLY DOES NOT HAVE THIS FREEDOM AND IS SOMETIMES LIMITED BY THE "BUREAUCRATIC CONSTRAINTS" OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE WHICH MAY CRIPPLE HIS EFFECTIVENESS, HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY, AND HIS IMAGINATIVENESS. THERE IS A NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK IN WHICH DECENTRALIZATION COULD TAKE PLACE AND FOR ESTABLISHED SYSTEMWIDE GUIDELINES, OBJECTIVES, AND STANDARDS WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE AND PERMIT FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY. VARIOUS TYPES OF DECENTRALIZATION AND COMBINATIONS OF METHODS ARE FEASIBLE. THE ACCOUNTABILITY FACET, WHICH IS NECESSARY IN DECENTRALIZATION PLANS, SHOULD BE STRUCTURED AS A PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL RATHER THAN AS A RATING AND OUGHT TO BE VIEWED AS AN AID TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH. THERE SHOULD BE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, WHICH SHOULD INCLUDE INTERCOMMUNICATION AND USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SHOULD GIVE THE COMMUNITY A ROLE IN SETTING SCHOOL GOALS AND STANDARDS. A PROPOSAL IS MADE FOR A COMMITTEE OF PRINCIPALS TO HELP DEVELOP DECENTRALIZATION PLANS FOR THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOLS. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE, THE PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION, JUNE 14, 1967. (NH)

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REMARKS GIVEN BY DR. MARK R. SHEDD
Annual Spring Conference
The Philadelphia Principals Association
June 14, 1967

Tonight I would like to pick up some of the ideas I sketched out for you on May 18 and try to develop them in somewhat greater detail. I am aware that my use of such terms as autonomy, decentralization and accountability raised many questions. And I don't expect that I will be able to answer them all tonight. In fact, I would hope that your group meetings later on this evening provide some of the answers and raise even more questions. For while there is no doubt in my mind that changes are desirable and will happen, it will take time, consultation and careful planning to make them have any meaning.

I would like to begin with a few illustrations which, I think, raise a number of pertinent questions about education in the big cities today.

Recently I talked to a man some of you have met: Seymour Gang, principal of an elementary school in Harlem which serves a mixed Spanish-speaking and Negro population. Gang is a remarkable man and so is his school. It is the only school in Harlem where the pupils consistently scored at national standards or above--and many pupils were above--in New York's recent administration of the Iowa tests.

I have visited Gang's school and it is an interesting experience. It is a huge elementary school built on a bluff, fortress-style. But while I was there, parents from the surrounding community wandered in and out. Kids moved through the halls not in silent lines but chatting, open and animated. The walls of the school are alive with displays of the spontaneous work of children. The teachers seem to echo that same spontaneity. There is an ethos in the school which says that something is happening.

But one looks in vain for gimmicks in Gang's school. His teachers

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use much of the same material you find in any school. The class sizes are the same. There is no more specialized staff than in other Harlem Schools. When Gang was in Philadelphia recently, I made the mistake of asking him what is unique about his school. He took great exception to my choice of words. "We're not unique," he said. "All the other schools in Harlem are unique. We are what a school should be."

Although Seymour is not here to defend himself, I would like to suggest some ways in which his school--if not unique--is at least unusual. First of all, Seymour Gang runs his own school; and he does not let the system run it. He ignores or rejects Central Office edicts which make no sense to him; he recruits for his own school, rejecting any central office personnel placement unless he has seen the candidate teach and is satisfied. New York, like Philadelphia, has a rule that field trips are not to be taken outside the city limits. But a few weeks ago a class from Gang's school visited Philadelphia and next week two classes are going to Washington (using money, incidentally, that he solicited personally from community business men and others, including Harry Belafonte.) Not only does Gang let the community wander into the school but he and his faculty wander out. He knows the parents, the business men, the bartenders, the corner hangers and he belongs to their organizations. There is a union contract in New York, just as there is in Philadelphia, which puts strict limits on the time a teacher must spend after school without pay. But, also like the Philadelphia contract, there is no prohibition on teachers volunteering time. It is not unusual to find teachers--young white girl teachers, still at the school in the center of supposedly dangerous Harlem at 6 p.m., planning a project, discussing pupils, refining curriculum. And the United Federation of Teachers has never filed a grievance against Gang. In fact, until it turned out that his school was getting better achievement results than the More Effective Schools program sponsored by the UFT, Gang had strong union support.

But the real "gimmick" in Gang's school--the device which he thinks makes it work is appallingly simple. He insists--and all his teachers believe--that every single child can learn and that if a child is not learning, the child has not failed but the school has. There is none of the business in Gang's school of checking an I.Q. score and consigning a child to oblivion.

There is no explaining that since this child is culturally disadvantaged or since that child's father is a lush he cannot learn. In short, children do not suffer the degradation of labels, stereo types or low teacher expectation.

And neither, I should add, do the teachers. Gang expects as much out of them as he assumes they will expect from the pupils. And here is where the role of the principal becomes so critical: in this hall of mirrors we call the School District, the superintendent will get no more out of an associate than he expects. The associate will get no more out of the district superintendent than he expects, and so on from the district superintendent to the principals; the principal to the teacher; the teacher to the kids. If you treat your teachers as incompetents, they will surely be incompetent. If you treat the union representative as a foe, he will surely be a foe. If you expect your teachers to use their full range of intelligence, if you permit them and encourage them to use it and if you give them the room to use it, then they will. And the beneficiary of this entire process will be the child. If the process is dysfunctional, on the other hand, the whole weight of the system, the snowballing effect of disgruntled and dehumanizing expectations will flatten that same child. If we believe this--and I do--then every observation made about principals can be equally applied to the whole system, and indeed it can. But above and beyond this general process, it is particularly the principal who is the key. He stands at the intersection of the system and the individual classroom. His actions, his philosophy, his personality are the critical determinants of the kind of education a child receives.

So much for the tale of one first rate principal. You all know others

like him. The second fragment of this collage is a different perception of schools: the system perceived through the eyes of a parent I met a few weeks ago. She has three children. One is a dropout from a Philadelphia high school. Two are in the Philadelphia elementary schools. She happens to be a Negro and she makes a meager living as a domestic. She is separated from her husband. Her daughter--the dropout--has a small child and a husband serving time for armed robbery. She was terribly upset when her daughter dropped out of the 12th grade to get married. She remains terribly concerned about the education of her remaining two children. And she was telling me her concerns.

She was upset because her oldest was completing 6th grade but there was not going to be any graduation ceremony. She was upset because a daughter in the 4th grade was not getting any homework to do. The daughter, she said, was not learning how to read very well either, but she was getting passing grades. I asked her about the amount of contact she had with the school. She described a parents night to me--a worthwhile institution, but not worth much if it happened the way it was described. All the teacher did, she said, was tell parents how much trouble so and so was, or how slow somebody else was, or what a hopeless mathematician somebody else was. Finally, my acquaintance asked about her daughter. "Oh," said the teacher, "your child doesn't do anything but run off at the mouth." I asked if those were the exact words the teacher used. "Yes," she replied, "run off at the mouth."

Moreover, she said, there was a new rule that no parent could talk to a teacher without first clearing it with the principal, and when she tried to set up a conference, she said, the principal said there was nothing to talk about because the teacher had not asked for a conference.

Was this an accurate report, you may ask, of what happened in that school? I don't know. Quite possibly it was not and certainly no school can be judged on the say so of one parent. But the really important thing to me is not

so much the accuracy of her perception but the quality of her perception. As long as parents and the larger community feel that the schools--or any one school--are basically not responsive, or not concerned but are hostile, we have fallen well short of the mark, and I seriously doubt that our fundamental educational goals--the cognitive and personal growth of students--can be achieved.

Third, I want to give you a brief snatch of a problem a principal related so I do not give you the impression that I am only looking at one side of the coin. This is the problem of a principal who wanted to hold a community meeting to try to iron out a hot issue involving feeder patterns that would affect the school. Following procedure set forth in Administrative Bulletin No.4, he asked his district superintendent for permission to hold the meeting. He was told no--apparently because it might be a bit raucous. Against his better judgment, the principal turned down the community's request for a meeting. Acrimony followed, splitting the community and assailing the school. And I could name other instances, both in terms of community relations and instructional program and personnel, where the judgment of the man closest to the scene--the principal--was overridden with bad results. But you can all fill in the blanks, I am sure.

Well, the question is, how do these three examples fit together? I think that is pretty easy to see. I have perhaps somewhat glorified the achievement of Seymour Gang to give you a notion of the kind of principal and the kind of school I would like to see all over Philadelphia, as I am sure you all would too. I have described the reverse situation--at least as it is perceived by one member of the community of one school--and I have suggested that there are reasons exterior to the principal himself which produce less than fortunate results.

It should also be pretty clear that I am using Seymour Gang as an example of a decentralized principal--one who has considerable freedom from the arbitrariness of central office, and one who is engaged in some of the activities which I, were I a principal, would like to engage in myself: participation in community

affairs and relations, recruiting of staff, deployment of staff, curriculum adaptation and sometimes curriculum development with the teachers. In short, it would be a school where I was free to experiment in a number of ways and where I had the power to shape the program and destiny of my school according to my perception of needs.

Furthermore, it would be a school where the lack of arbitrary constraints--on my part or the part of central office--would permit teachers and pupils to have some of the same benefits and would permit the unlocking of their talents.

It is obvious, of course, that I have picked a loaded example in Seymour Gang; for he has achieved this through bucking the system. And if he had fallen on his face, he would be dead. There are no doubt other principals in New York who have tried to do the same thing, been not so lucky and been given the axe for rocking the boat. I suspect there have been a few such examples here.

It is at this point that the importance of bureaucratic changes and reforms begins to emerge. The primary goal of decentralization, as I see it, is to eliminate the bureaucratic constraints that make an enemy of the system. It is to unlock principals, to unlock teachers, to unlock kids. In other words, to make every man a Gang without having to stick his neck out to do what he knows he should.

Given that very general goal, I know it is meaningless unless some detail about implementation follows. Let me try to clarify the framework in which decentralization would take place. First of all, there is a clear need for the establishment of systemwide guidelines, objectives and standards within which diversity can be permitted and encouraged. Some of these guidelines--perhaps we should call them constraints--are established by state law. Others are established by Board of Education policies, the Educational Home Rule Charter

Supplement, the union contract. Still others really need to be created. That is, to my knowledge there is no clear statement anywhere of the goals of the School System as they relate to pupils beyond the most glittering generalities. Until such a statement on goals has been formulated, there can be little significant progress towards decentralization.

There has to be clear formulation of job descriptions in terms of function, power and responsibility for every level of the system, beginning with the distinction between the policy role of the School Board and of administration. There must be a reordering of central office to better serve the field in a decentralized operation, and the processes of administration--data gathering, communications, lines of authority--must be cleaned up and streamlined to eliminate the systematic harassment of field personnel.

Equally important, new channels must be created both for feedback from the field and for new ideas from the field--and by this I mean channels from community and teachers as well as principals.

Then we must look very closely at what is meant by decentralization. There is a basic distinction to be made between the decentralization of functions or personnel and the decentralization of authority. And we also have to think of levels of decentralization. I don't think, for instance, that it makes much sense to decentralize payroll operations at all. Nor would it make sense to turn every school into a warehouse. But it might make sense to establish District level supermarkets for fast pickup of staple supplies.

Facilities planning and design is something probably handled best at the Central level. But personnel--and particularly the assignment of teachers--is something that the principal must have a say in. In such an area, there is not necessarily any one way of decentralizing, but alternate techniques might be used. There might be a centrally-gathered talent pool from which principals' select the

kind of teacher they need by reviewing papers and hopefully by interview. Or some principals might want to get directly into the act of recruiting. I have already talked to you about the dispersal of supervisors to the field as technical support at the district or school or cluster level. These are all examples of functions or personnel which can and probably should be decentralized to different levels of the organization.

Decentralization of manpower or function obviously implies decentralization of authority, in many cases. For instance, if a curriculum specialist is assigned to a group of schools under the control of a dean, the responsibility for curriculum development would lodge there too. This does not preclude use of central office resources in developing curriculum or even of central office guides, however. If the authority for curriculum is given to a principal, then one of his options, clearly, is to use the curriculum which has already been developed centrally. I emphasize this point because there seems to be some feeling abroad that under decentralization, teachers or principals would be forced to develop curriculum materials. This is not so. But they might well be accountable for the results of the curriculum or materials used.

Perhaps what I have just said will give you a clearer idea of what I mean by decentralization and autonomy: decentralization of different degrees and responsibilities and functions to different levels of the system. Autonomy within legal and policy constraints.

Which brings to a third key concept: accountability. It became clear to me over the past weekend at a retreat in the Poconos with a cross section of central office staff and principals that there is confusion and some apprehension about my use of the word accountability.

Let me reiterate that accountability is not the same as punishment. Let me go further to say that I think it will be necessary to change considerably our idea of rating principals (and, parenthetically, teachers) if accountability is to

have meaning as a positive and not a stifling concept. I do not believe it is possible to rate a principal A, B, C, or D. Nor do I believe it is possible to do so for a teacher, and I have some real questions about how we mark children. For too often a grade is a "mark"--something the child or adult is pegged with which tends to limit our examination of what he really is. And this cuts both ways, for if there is a tendency to give up on a "D" pupil, there is probably an equal tendency to assume that we do not have to think much about an "A" student.

What we have to do is get away from the idea of ratings into the idea of performance appraisals. What I mean by that, as some of you heard me say over the weekend, is a dynamic kind of evaluation that seeks to identify areas for improvement as well as existing areas of strength. Without going into detail, let me say that this kind of approach, involving both subordinate and superordinate, eliminates some arbitrary standard, such as X-number of complaints a year from community as an unsatisfactory rating, and permits both negotiation, remediation and growth of awareness. It may occasionally develop that over time it becomes clear that one man is not cut out for the particular job he is in and would be better off in another. I feel that with a sensitive system of performance appraisal, this kind of recognition is usually reached by superordinate and subordinate at the same time, and is usually much to the relief of both. I have had such experiences and I am sure each of you has in dealing with teachers. Appraisal, then should basically operate as an aid to professional growth. Since this topic should come up in your deliberations later this evening, I suspect it would be waste motion for me to try to go into possible mechanics on it now.

There is one area I want to stress, however, because I do not think I can stress it too much. That is the whole question of community relations. There are stirrings in communities around the country and in Philadelphia, particularly ghetto communities, and these stirrings are going to get louder. The community is not going to stand for weak teaching, poor achievement or insensitive human relations.

This is absolutely clear to me and last weekend made it clear to me that many principals are equally aware of it and are looking for better ways to relate to the community.

It strikes me that when we talk of community involvement, there are a number of different things we mean. One is simply the question of communications--to the community and from the community. This means both clarifying of policies and satisfying the individual parent's concern about the individual child's progress. Second is the utilization of community resources, be they volunteers, teacher aides, bus matrons or whatnot. And the third is giving the community a real voice in the setting of school goals and standards. A number of principals last weekend at the Buck Hill Falls retreat suggested the idea of forming Community Advisory Councils--groups which would meet regularly with the principal and share in the process of setting goals and standards. There are a lot of questions about how such a committee would function, but the basic suggestion is one which I feel has a great deal of merit. For while I think there is a thirst for power in the community, I also know there is real power in the community. And just as we wish to unlock the power of teachers and children through decentralization, I would also hope it is a means for unlocking community power. We have the choice of drawing back in fear of the community, or we can welcome its participation as an added resource that ultimately would have benefits not only to individual school programs but which could give education a political power base such as it has never had before. The choice is yours.

I am sure that in your deliberations tonight many useful suggestions and questions will arise. I am worried, however, about dissipating the effect of one night and losing the insights which are in this room. I hope some provisions have been made for recording the conclusions of your group meetings. But more than that, I would like to formalize the procedure. I am proposing now that this association form a small committee, including no more than nine persons--for any-

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thing larger tends to become unwieldy, in my estimation,--and that this committee be convened at regular intervals to give guidance in the whole question of decentralization. It would be a committee I would meet with periodically and which would be charged with at least three major responsibilities.

1. Recommending the degree of decentralization appropriate to different functions.
2. Defining clearly the responsibilities, authority and accountabilities which a principal should have to make decentralization work.
3. Establishing lines of communication and a procedure to permit all principals to feed ideas into the committee.

I would prefer it if you were able to include representatives of the senior high principals in this committee.

I know that I will need the kind of help such a committee will provide and I know there are insights principals can bring to the plans for decentralization which are special and essential. I hope you would be able to establish such a committee in time for a first meeting within two weeks. Again, the choice is yours.

Thank you.